

# The Secret Wisdom of Transgenderism

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replying to [Joshua Mitchell's "Dead Conservative Memes Can't Defeat the Identity Politics Clerisy"](#)

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## Old errors shed new light on eternal truth.

Men are not women, and women are not men. There can be no disagreement between one's sex and his "gender," a term that referred almost exclusively to grammatical categories rather than people until a 20th-century "[sexologist](#)" redefined it to draw a distinction without a difference. No one *is* "genderqueer," "pangender," "two-spirit," or any of the other 50 some-odd fictional identity categories promoted by gender activists. Transgenderism is not true.

But what does it mean? What does it mean that, although just .014% of men and 0.003% of women suffer from [gender dysphoria](#), a recent [survey](#) conducted by Harris Poll found that a full 12% of Millennials identify as either transgender or "gender non-conforming"? What does it mean that last year a Virginia school board [voted unanimously](#) to fire a teacher for refusing to refer to his female student as a man?

It means that after a century or more of shallow secularism, even devout scientific materialists intuit the existence of metaphysical reality. We are not, *pace* Planned Parenthood, mere clumps of cells. A test tube cannot contain our loves, our hopes, our joys, or our identity. So much of what we know to be real escapes the microscope's lens.

The transgender movement recognizes that we are not merely our bodies. Everyone feels some discomfort in his body. As a purely physical matter, fat men wish to be thin, and bald men want hair. On the spiritual side, to paraphrase the Apostle, we do not understand our own actions, for we do not do what we want, but we do the very things we hate. To quote his Master, "the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." The transgender movement understands the feeling of discord between who we actually are and who we are meant to be.

Unfortunately gender ideologues follow these right intuitions to wrong conclusions. We are not merely our bodies, but transgender activists would have us believe that our bodies have nothing at all to do with who we really are. No less a leftist than Hillary Clinton admitted as much in a [recent interview](#) with the BBC. "I do think there is a legitimate concern about women's lived experience and the importance of recognizing that and also the importance of recognizing the self-identification."

But Hillary contradicts herself.

If our bodies in any way relate to our true selves—that is, if our true selves are not merely disembodied spirits but flesh as well, as in the case of the women whose concerns Hillary acknowledges—then how can one deny that relation to the body through "self-identification"? By Hillary's own premise, any "self-identification" that

denies the body denies, at least in part, the self.

Hillary Clinton dismisses the contradiction. “This is all relatively new,” she explains. “People are still trying to find the language for it.” In fact, nothing about the transgender denial of physical reality is new, and we already have language for it: gnostic dualism.

This ancient heresy has taken many forms over the millennia, from Manichaeism in the third century to Albigensianism in the 12th. The details have differed, but the main thrust has remained the same: a denial of the physical world, created by an evil god, in favor of the spirit, which constitutes our true selves and ultimate reality. Through this lens, the body transforms from an aspect of ourselves into a prison of pollution from which we must escape.

The Church, and through her our whole civilization, has long condemned this view as heresy, recognizing man instead as a unity of body and soul. While Adam before the Fall felt fine in his own skin, original sin has warped this harmony. But the angel with the flaming sword remains. We may not return to the Garden, and no political campaign can perfect human nature.

Transgender soteriology admits no such constraints, presenting a paradox: the body has no bearing on the self—matter does not matter—but nevertheless the body must undergo painful and expensive mutilations to more closely resemble the imagined metaphysical self. When pressed on this contradiction, the ideologues abandon their metaphysics altogether and locate the “true self” somewhere in the body, typically in the brain. They refer to [dubious medical reports](#) that the brains of men who identify as women more closely resemble those of women than men, [whatever that means](#) in a culture that denies cognitive sex differences and [embraces](#) “biologically female” phalli.

By discarding the faith of their ancestors as fanciful, gender ideologues leave themselves prey to every dippy religious whim the Church ever routed, insisting upon their secret knowledge with Pelagian confidence to a scientific culture that denies the immaterial. It cannot survive scientific, philosophical, or religious scrutiny.

Still, the ideologues’ intuitions convey a certain secret wisdom in an atheistic age: namely, that man is fundamentally a religious being, and, as Cardinal Henry Edward Manning [observed](#), “all human conflict is ultimately theological.”

Leftists have long fallen for false religion, from the communist “god that failed” to environmental eschatology. Perhaps the present crisis of identity will remind a confused culture of the God that made it, called I AM, the source and summit of all identity.

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